

## **DREEm: Production Guide**

This guide provides information about issues that you may wish to consider when creating digital experiences for your organisation. It is by no means exhaustive and certain aspects may apply to a greater or lesser degree to your project or production depending on the nature and scope of the experience you are creating – and whether work is being commissioned externally to your organisation.

### **Writing a Brief**

Whether the digital experience will be developed by people who are inside the organisation or commissioned from external specialists, it is useful to develop a brief to ensure that everybody has a common vision about what you want to achieve. If you can, it may be helpful in advance of writing the brief to develop a matrix of the skills that you require to develop the digital experience so that you can ensure that the brief(s) cover all of your needs. If the project has been initiated through a grant or similar funding mechanism, it may also be essential to check that your briefs and any other work you are commissioning meets the criteria of eligibility and terms of the award set out by the funding body.

Issues to consider when writing a brief are listed below.

#### **1) Who is the Digital Experience Production Brief For?**

When preparing a creative brief to share with potential digital production partners it can be useful to begin by asking “who is going to be reading this?” Is the intention to brief a single partner or multiple collaborators? If the latter, might it be useful to create an overview of the project you can use across several customised briefs that may focus on specific aspects of the project or production. This may also help to identify the required skills?

#### **2) Project Overview**

Most briefs should start by giving an overview of the project, its aims and expected outputs. If the project has been initiated through a grant or similar funding mechanism, it may be essential to ensure you meet the criteria of eligibility and terms of the award set out by the funding body. It may be useful to implement an internal exercise to ensure the essence of the project can be communicated succinctly to external parties. Avoid using jargon, and provide a clear context for industry or sector-specific terminology (the DREEm Glossary may be helpful)

Clearly communicating who the intended audience is and what you are hoping to deliver to them, through the digital experience is vital. For instance, in the case of the Immersive Van Gogh exhibition (<https://vangoghexpo.com/>) this may have been expressed as “*We are looking to present a selection of works by the artist in a fully immersive, walk through, gallery style environment using a blend of large scale projection and*

*digital screens accompanied by a custom audio and music composition that amplifies the content and setting of each artwork.”*

### **3) The Ask**

An obvious but often overlooked or poorly communicated element of a brief is what exactly you're asking the production partner to do, create or provide. To what extent will creative or strategic input, if at all, be required? Will the partner be delivering production up to and including set up of the experience, or will they be retained in an ongoing capacity for delivery of the experience (for instance in an event management or live streaming supervision role). This will have implications on what is feasible, and overall cost and resources. It may also be useful to plan in addition for a minimum project delivery option that draws upon existing resources in your organisation without external support(e.g. hardware, screens, website use etc.)

While some digital production partners may be able to provide end-to-end services for the full scope of the project, others may specialise in a particular stage of development or delivery, meaning additional talent may need to be sourced in order to deliver specific areas of work outside the scope of the core partner. A simple way to do this is to present a non-exhaustive Scope of Works which can also help save time when the contracting phase is reached - as key deliverables will have been discussed, refined and agreed upon before it gets to drawing up the paperwork.

### **4) Planning and Timelines**

Any brief should include a delivery timeline and key milestones. When specifying timelines, it is important to understand how different organisations work. Larger organisations, for example, may have longer lead times for signing off on content than those that are small; digital productions that are funded by grants may need key project elements to be signed off by the grant giving agency; charities may need trustee agreement on outputs and so on. Assuming there is a deadline that the digital production or experience needs to be ready by, it is vital to outline any expectations or requirements around key project milestones. Central to this will be an approvals process against any work or assets created as part of the deliverables can be checked, commented on and refined.

Production partners may have a very specific way of working when it comes to project planning and production processes but communicating any expectations up front can help ensure as close an alignment of processes and needs as possible. It will also give you an early opportunity in the project lifecycle to adjust the timeline on the advice of your partner if they suggest certain delivery dates might be unrealistic or overly challenging to delivering work that meets quality expectations.

Also key will be the way in which the timeline is presented and shared – if your organisation permits access to Outlook 365 or Google Drive it can be helpful to work from a single live document so that any adjustments to milestones or feedback windows can be reviewed and tracked through a single shared source.

Waterfall project planning allows you to track how different elements on the timeline relate to one another so that in the event one deliverable or milestone shifts, all contingent project elements will automatically adjust accordingly. It may be beneficial to familiarise yourself with this style of planning approach if you are not already. Similarly, establishing a clear RASCI or RACI (Responsible, Accountable, Supporting, Consulted and Informed) matrix or organisational chart for the project at the outset can be helpful. For further information on this click [here](#).

## 5) How to Respond

Having outlined the project goals, requirements and key timeline milestones, it is essential to advise the potential partner on the timetable for submissions and decisions and, in what form you wish their response to take. This might include:

- a portfolio of recent & relevant digital production projects that indicate their capabilities around the specific sorts of technical and creative services you are looking to retain.
- client testimonials or reference for validation of work quality.
- an initial creative proposal (for modification and development) to gain a deeper appreciation of their understanding of the project and creative alignment with its intended outputs.
- an initial top-line budget against the scope of work set out in the brief.

Clearly specifying the form of the response is vital and standardising this across respondents is preferable as it will allow you to compare competing partners on as close to a like for like basis as possible. Be sure to include the name of the person who needs to receive the response and the preferred contact details for them.

## 6) Distributing the Brief & Finding Partners

Making sure your brief is seen in a timely manner by potential production partners can make or break the first key deadline. Your online network websites, newsletters and news sources, social channels, Facebook, Instagram & twitter may be a good place to start. Linking the brief to followers and subscribers may attract interest from a digital provider that

aligns to your organisation's brand, and interests. A governing or trade body for your industry or organisation may also help publicise the brief.

If you are looking for a partner whose creative or technical skillset is outside the scope of your standard commercial or organisational practice then often the best place to begin is by researching. The [DREEm Compendium](#) lists 145 examples of experience economy projects which may be a useful starting point and resource to compare existing or past digital production projects. Using this resource, an online search will help you find further information about key elements of creative production. Given the emerging nature of digital experiences, people and companies are often willing to share knowledge, provide advice on who they worked with and introduce their network. A more targeted approach may offer some initial degree of vetting through recommendation.

### **Budgeting Considerations**

The way in which you approach budgeting will, of course, vary from project to project, the available resources, timings and deliverables. There are, however, several key considerations common to most digital production projects.

- 1) To maximise efficiency across your budget it can be useful to think about the skills needed at each stage of the project and consider whether that individual or partner organisation will be needed throughout, or just a certain moments. If the former, you may consider negotiating a fixed project fee based on a clearly defined Scope of Work (SOW). If an individual or organisation is only likely to be required for a single element, milestone or deliverable then negotiating and budgeting a day rate may be more cost effective.
- 2) Plan a contingency of between 10-20% of the final gross budgeted cost. There will invariably be scope creep as creative parameters shift, ambition amplifies, or timeline pressures require sprint stages and having a reserved pot of funds, in order to cover essential but often unpredictable costs can make the difference to achieving the end goal.
- 3) Consider potential licensing costs against any 'off-the-shelf' software or platform solutions. Wherever you rely on existing programs or services ensure there is a fixed license cost up front, or establish whether the license holder operates a variable revenue share model based on claiming a percentage of income generated against monetisation of the work.

Consider any ongoing or recurring costs that might extend past the initial period of the activation. For instance, if you intend to keep an exhibition microsite live and available to the public online past the closing date of an experience e.g. exhibition. This may also carry a hosting cost from your Internet Service Provider or Domain Provider.

- 4) Consider remuneration of talent that may create or appear in digital content. For instance, an actor who may previously have been paid a fixed fee based on a given performance run and number of shows might require additional payment for you to secure the rights to record, reproduce and monetize their performance through an on-demand or streaming delivery service.

Consider technical crew who may be governed by the rules of BECTU or similar formalised trade union organisations may require additional buyout fees if, for instance, their work as a lighting engineer or set builder is continued to be used in a more permanent digital format. When in doubt, be sure to speak with agents and diary services to ensure this conversation is broached in advance.

Consider researching available R&D or innovation grants based on the nature of the creative output you may be delivering. [Digital Catapult](#) offers a Creative XR scheme toward prototyping immersive content. The Knowledge Transfer Partnership ([KTP](#)) scheme may be useful for example if a more experimental R&D approach, involving academic partners, is required. Epic Games, for instance, run a '[Mega Grants](#)' program that offers funding for any project that uses their Unreal Engine in its execution. Opportunities to offset costs through grants may also inform choices of software to ensure eligibility for commercial or governmental funding.

### **Marketing Considerations**

Ensuring the relevant potential audience is aware of you and your [Digital Experience Production](#) is crucial to ensuring its success – both in terms of attendance and potentially financial return. There are a number of simple steps you may consider when thinking about ways to market your project to the public

- 1) Targeting the existing audience for your organisation will be the foundation of your marketing activity. Provided your organisation has the necessary permissions required through the GDPR in its collection of audience data, email marketing is a low to no cost first step to ensure your core audience is aware of upcoming digital experiences productions, performances or shows.
- 2) Most organisations have a public-facing website. This will be an important place to promote upcoming experiences and using behind the scenes or 'making-of' content can help strengthen the standard promotional activity. This type of material as a teaser will add depth to the marketing story and help amplify understanding and curiosity.

Website promotion may take the form of video or written 'blog' style posts that leverage access to talent and creatives. The work of the Royal Shakespeare Company in its marketing of the Dream production is a good example (see the [DREEm website](#) for a case study). Importantly consider

planning promotional activity and product development During the overall budgeting process. Edits for marketing teasers may be at additional cost, or draw upon a different budget or funding mechanism within the organisation.

- 3) Social media is another low-to-no cost opportunity to drive awareness. The benefit of platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and YouTube is that they allow you to include engaging moving images, audio and so on. Be sure to plan ahead during production in order to capture any bespoke media assets needed to align with a consistent editorial calendar of content.

Tech and dress rehearsals, as well as key stages of project development and creative breakthroughs can offer compelling hooks to appeal to audiences. Where possible, be sure to link back to your organisation's website through a 'link in bio' or 'link in description' so the connections to audience are simple, and points of interest, translate to point of sale.

- 4) 'Earned media' can be an impactful way to generate buzz and ticket sales. The experience economy landscape is a space of frequent firsts and 'never seen before' cultural moments. The press are always keen to pick up on these stories and amplify them to a broad audience which may extend beyond the core group who are aware of your organisation.

For this reason, it may be a shrewd decision to set aside some of your budget to work with a specialist PR company who can look at placing news of your [Digital Experience Production](#) across consumer as well as B2B (Business to Business) media publications. Think beyond the conventions of your organisation and more broadly reaching to different audiences e.g. "Who might be interested in hearing about R&D in the VR space?" (again in the case of the RSC Dream) or "Who might be interested in reading about the creative application of VR to achieve more inclusive audience engagement?" (in the case of [Green Shoes Arts](#) programme).